



### **Chris Danou's Capitol Report**

#### **Assembly Bill 388 Brings Partisan Politics to the Government Accountability Board**

I can't help but just scratch my head these days. We have some real and obvious issues to address here in Wisconsin like funding our public schools, fixing our crumbling infrastructure, creating jobs, protecting our unique natural resources and quality of life and providing access to affordable health care. Yet, the majority party seems as though they'd rather play partisan politics instead of actually governing.

Last week, Representatives Dean Knudson (R-Hudson), Kathy Bernier (R-Chippewa Falls), and Senators Leah Vukmir (R-Wauwatosa) and Devin LeMahieu (R-Oostburg) introduced Assembly Bill 388 (AB 388) to reorganize the structure and makeup of the Government Accountability Board (GAB). This proposal is one that is strange and polarizing.

The GAB was created in 2008 during the administration of Democratic Governor Jim Doyle and a split legislature with the Democrats controlling the Senate and Republicans controlling the Assembly. It was formed as a non-partisan agency as a result of a merger between the former State Ethics Board and State Elections Boards. The GAB consists of six members, all of which are former state judges who serve staggered, six-year terms. GAB staff is also non-partisan and is organized into two divisions; the Elections Division and the Ethics and Accountability Division to administer and enforce Wisconsin law pertaining to campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying. These are all areas that uphold and continue Wisconsin's commitment to having open, transparent and clean government.

Laws are made for fairness so it's important to have a non-partisan agency that keeps the system and those playing on the field open and honest. We live in hyper-partisan political times so it's now even more important to make sure the referees are non-partisan. It's a slap in the face to democracy when lawmakers try to make things even more partisan than they already are in Wisconsin. That's exactly what AB 388 does and it's a solution in search of a problem when we have real problems to deal with in Wisconsin.

Under AB 388 as written, a new Ethics and Elections Commission would be made up of members who are appointed by the Majority and Minority Leader in the Senate, the Speaker and Minority Leader in the Assembly and two former municipal or county clerks agreed upon by leadership in both houses. The bill also directs the secretary of the Department of Administration (who is appointed by the Governor) to determine which positions, employees, assets and liabilities, property, contracts, rules, orders, opinions, and matters are transferred to which commission and to adopt an implementation plan for the transfer containing his or her determinations. To have an appointed person in the executive branch and high-powered member of the Governor's administration get involved makes this even more political and partisan in nature.

Indeed, it's really unfortunate when we know there are things we must address here in Wisconsin that will benefit communities across the state, and yet those in charge would rather play partisan politics. We know we need to do a better job funding our public education, UW-System and tech colleges, infrastructure, state parks, and health care. We know we need to do a better job focusing on our economy and creating jobs that pay family-supporting wages. We know we need our elections to be run in a fair and non-partisan manner by people who will not manipulate the outcome. The people of Wisconsin deserve better.

